



## Why Israel is the one thing you can't protest against in Western universities

Sat 11:03 pm +01:00, 11 May 2024

posted by *danceaway*

<https://www.rt.com/news/597066-israel-destroyed-western-universities/>  
6 May, 2024 21:43

HomeWorld News

**The crackdown on pro-Palestine campus protests might just make college kids hate the establishment again**



By **Rachel Marsden**, a columnist, political strategist, and host of independently produced talk-shows in French and English.

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Pro-Palestinian protesters at George Washington University, Washington, DC, May 2, 2024. © Chip Somodevilla / Getty Images

The American university crowd didn't seem to mind too much when the state was ushering in authoritarian green policies under the dodgy pretext of reducing the temperature of the planet. Or when campuses were banning right-wing speakers. Or when everyone was being forced to comply with their 'revolution' over personal pronoun usage. Or when unvaccinated fellow students were being banned from campus during the Covid-19 fiasco. But now that the Western establishment, from North America to Europe, is cracking down on campus protesters demonstrating against Israel's ongoing bombing of Gaza civilians, they're suddenly wondering where all their rights went.

If those who are now upset with the campus crackdowns had bothered to help expand the Overton window – that is, the range of acceptable speech and debate – back when others with whom they disagreed were trying to pry it open as widely as possible, they'd be reaping the benefits of true free speech now. Instead, the establishment has enjoyed a culture of impunity, enabled by the woke crowd and its constant demands for safe spaces. And now the government and universities have unilaterally decided that it's Israel that needs a safe space and protection from college kids.

To that end, the US Congress has just passed a new bill broadening the definition of anti-Semitism on university campuses to include *"targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity."* How about another law banning criticism of Iran because it's a collective of Muslims? Or of Russia because it's a collective of Orthodox Christians? Or of China because it's a collective of Buddhists? Can't have that, because it would enable the state in question to act with carte blanche impunity by scaring critics into silence.

Not only is the establishment using force to crack down on protesters, but it's now formally legislating against dissent, even though 55% of Americans are against Israel's actions in Gaza, according to a Gallup poll from March. Not even the Israeli establishment is going that far to quash dissent when, just a few days ago, thousands of Israelis rallied around the country in opposition to the government's handling of the crisis and in favor of a ceasefire. So are they just a bunch of anti-Semites, too?



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The Western establishment's constant reductio ad absurdum, conflating pro-ceasefire and anti-genocide activism with anti-Semitism, is exactly the kind of thing that the establishment has been doing for years to ram through its agenda. Don't like blowing cash on Ukraine? Then you're doing the Kremlin's bidding. Opposed to carbon taxes? You're a science denier. Didn't buy the ever-changing Covid narrative? You're a threat to society.

While the US establishment is pretending to be scandalized by the ground-breaking concept of university students actively protesting injustice, much of the focus in Europe has been on one particular campus – Sciences Po – where I taught in the master's program for seven years. It's basically the French equivalent of Harvard.

Initially, students faced off against French riot police and refused to budge when the authorities repeatedly threatened to use force if the students didn't move as they blocked the campus with a sit-in to demand a ceasefire in Gaza. Some students ended up facing disciplinary proceedings as a result. The students have also been demanding that the university cut all ties with entities related to the state of Israel, which management has refused to do. There haven't been any campus uprisings against Russia amid the conflict in Ukraine, and yet these same universities, including Sciences Po, didn't hesitate to cut ties with Russian universities. So why not with Israel? Because that simply isn't the establishment's position, unlike in the case of Russia. These institutions' lofty values of *"universality, humanity, and tolerance,"* as the director of Sciences Po Strasbourg put it, are apparently selectively imposed. Kind of like campus free speech these days.

Even when Sciences Po dropped the disciplinary actions against student protesters in exchange for the students agreeing to attend a formal debate on campus to air out grievances on all sides, at least one member of the center-right establishment, the vice president of former President Nicolas Sarkozy's party, Les Republicains, was furious about the mere notion of even entertaining the possibility. *"We cannot finance a school which has become the place of entryism, a mixture of leftism and Islamism, which legitimizes anti-Semitic remarks and acts of violence,"* Francois-Xavier Bellamy said. Bellamy's Les Republicains colleague, Valerie Pecresse, president of the Greater Paris Region, straight-up suspended its own funding of the university.

The end result of this establishment censorship is a safe space that shelters the establishment's own rhetoric and ideas from criticism. We're talking here about the top university for educating France's future political elites, so you'd think it would be a good idea for students to be battle-hardened in the arena of contentious political debate and conflict. Instead, these soft-handed elites want the school to protect their narrative at the expense of the most critical kind of diversity – that of critical thought.



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Even French President Emmanuel Macron has recently echoed the students' concerns in calling out Israel's actions. *"Deep indignation at the images reaching us from Gaza where civilians have been targeted by Israeli soldiers,"* Macron said on X (formerly Twitter). *"I express my strongest disapproval of these shots and demand truth, justice and respect for international law."*

Earlier this year, Macron said that a two-state solution recognizing a Palestinian state isn't taboo for France. Not that he's actually taken any actual leadership action on that front. And Sciences Po isn't the only French campus to spark controversy on this issue. Cops cleared out a pro-Palestinian encampment this week at Paris' Sorbonne University. Why couldn't they just pretend that they were one of the migrant camps along the Seine and plaguing various other parts of the city for years on end? Pretty sure those migrants aren't big fans of Israel, either. So why do they get to stay and block the city?

And when left-wing France Insoumise party leader Jean-Luc Melenchon had his conference on Palestine at Lille University canceled last month, he compared the university's president to Nazi Adolf Eichmann, who famously said he was just following orders. The French education minister piped up to say that she'd file a criminal complaint for public injury in support of the university president and on behalf of the government. Way to prove Melenchon wrong and dispel any notion of the heavy-handed state in his Eichmann reference.

The Western establishment supports free speech and democratic values – just as long as you find yourself on the same side as those with the power to redefine them at any given moment to suit their agenda on any given issue. The real revolution will be when this is no longer the case. Until then, episodes like the current campus chaos will only provide glimpses of this hypocritical reality as the facade of freedom temporarily cracks.

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